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### Deposited in DRO:

14 April 2014

### Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

Siddiqui, N. (2014) 'Women's magazines in Asian and Middle Eastern countries.', South Asian popular culture., 12 (1). pp. 29-40.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14746689.2014.879423>

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## Women's magazines in Asian and Middle Eastern countries

### **Abstract**

This article provides an overarching view of research available in the field of women's magazines and popular media in Asian and Middle Eastern countries. One of the common themes of research is the influence of western media on the other cultural media forms, and how it is having an impact on the portrayal of cultural values and women in these societies. However, these research studies do not provide any hard evidence on the impact of western influence on media cultural forms and on their consumers. The claims are mainly based on the analysis of non-random selection of women's magazines and their consumers. These studies suggest that the portrayal of women in magazines has been changing but causes of these changes are based on assumptions about western influences. This article explains that the Asian and Middle Eastern societies are evolving from within and this process of change is visible in the local media forms.

### **Introduction**

One of the main roles performed by the women's magazines is to articulate information on local, global and transnational trends and issues for the readers (Skalli 2006). Women's magazines are also cultural products satisfying needs and demands of consumers in different social and cultural settings. Advertising is seen as the main function of the women's magazines. However, reading for pleasure is another reason why women's magazines sell. It is largely accepted that literate women in any part of the world are target consumers of the capitalist industry and women's magazines mediate the relationship between consumers and industry. Women's magazines are also sites of presenting the idealism associated with women to perform their gender roles. Women's magazines across different cultures provide information on the cultural scripts of sexuality and are also manifestation of the media responses to the women's social status in time.

Women's magazines seem to have an essential presence in the developed as well as developing societies. However, the form, purpose and discourse of the magazines differ

according to the cultural norms. An essential contribution of these magazines is the space for informal learning where readers choose to read for leisure but cannot avoid receiving information such as on social issues, politics, health etc. Women's magazines thus become a medium where the purpose may not be the education of readers, but some kind of information is mediated to the readers. Learning is therefore attributed to these magazines although there is no established evidence if such learning ever changes behaviour of the consumers. A study conducted in the UK confirmed that leisure reading habit is a characteristic of people who seek for learning in their later-life and a learning society needs to acknowledge that learning is an on-going process, not necessarily dependent on formal institutions (Gorard and Rees 2002).

Fashion, glamour and idealistic projection of women's beauty are the main ingredients of women's magazines. Although conservative about Muslim women's appearance, Middle East and North African Islamic countries (*Sayidaty, Zahrat-al -Khaleej, Laha, Al Jamila, The Majalla*) also create a special niche for the women's magazines. In general fashion modelling for the magazines and appearance on other media forms are considered an immoral profession for Muslim women as it requires displaying their physical beauty to the public. In order to legitimize their presence in the conservative cultural settings, foreign models from Western, Asian and Mediterranean regions are used in the local Arabic versions of the women's magazines. Not many empirical studies were found on the production and readership of the women's magazines in Islamic countries. However, according to a general view, the market of women's magazines seems to follow cultural trends and make the product adjust its form according to the cultural demands. The examples of these adaptations will be discussed in this article with reference to women's magazines in Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

In the process of selecting research studies the most prominent research studies found were on women's magazines in the west. The available literature largely discusses the findings and theoretical frameworks of the western studies. However, in this article research on Turkish and Asian women's magazines is included to give a wider perspective of the field. In consideration of the fact that Asia is a continent with multiple systems of values and culture, the aspect of women's sexuality in the media is also received in different ways (Nelson and Paek 2005).

This article discusses research conducted on women's magazines and their readership in different countries other than in the western world. The selection of studies is based on systematic search of literature available online. The main key words used for search articles were women, magazines, Asia, Middle East, popular culture. The data bases explored were Google scholar, Jstor, Ebsco host and Science direct. The research on women's magazines and their readership is a vast area of inquiry; therefore, the studies included here are based on research conducted with varied research questions and research methods. However, one of the common themes of research is the influence of western media on the other cultural media forms and discourse, and how it is having an impact on the portrayal of values and women in the societies. The concerns of comparative research on the contents of women's magazines have focused portrayal of gender differences and changing cultural values due to media influence.

### **Turkish women's magazines**

Turkey is anomalous amongst Muslim majority countries mainly because Muslim women enjoy considerable freedom from the traditional interpretation of Islam. Turkish women's magazines have played a prominent role in the activism towards women's emancipation at the grass root level. Kirca's (2001) research study traces the journey of feminism in 1980s through Turkish women's magazines. The study is based on the role of two women's magazines, *Kim* and *Kadinca*, in which feminist ideology of liberalism was embraced in the spirit of revolution against traditional religious laws and customs. The identity projected and celebrated in the magazines was Turkish women who are successful in their career, modern towards sex relationships and independent in decision making. *Kim* and *Kandica* popularised the feminist activism during the 1980s and fostered the image of Turkish women with an emphasis on individual identity, sexual needs, economic independence and recognition of self in the male dominated society.

According to Kirca, *Kim* and *Kadinca* acted as agents to raise consciousness on the implications of political and legal actions on the ordinary lives of women. The editorials of both the magazines included critiques of the state laws that were against women's rights and also voiced concerns on legalised oppression of women through control on their bodies and minds. The stance of the women editors was progressive towards women's empowerment from the grass root level and to reinvent the image of empowered Turkish women.

Kirca's study is based on content analysis of the editorials and articles in the magazines. There is visual analysis of the selected advertisements stating the conflicting ideologies in the magazines where the underlying motives of the women's magazine publishing industry are described as economy driven instead of women's liberation in its true sense. The study also involved interviews with the editors of *Kim* and *Kadinca* which show that the women's magazines were the initiatives of two radical female journalists in Turkey. The descriptions in the study inform the agendas and styles of the magazines that seemingly made an impact on the existing norms in the media. The study also looks at the reasons why *Kim* and *Kadinca* could not survive in the market through not being able to attract advertisers to invest money.

Feminist ideology rejects stereotypes that are based on inequality of genders. However, advertising in the women's magazines heavily relies on traditional stereotypes. Moreover, the commercialisation of feminist ideas through popular women's magazines was seemingly in conflict with what feminists believe about commercial media and the representation of women. According to Ozturkmen (1998) *Kadinca* perpetuated feminist ideas among the masses, but as a genre of women's magazines it had limitations of the format. The magazine was also not welcomed by the academics who viewed women's magazines as agents perpetuating the stereotypes.

The two studies by Kirca and Ozturkmen on the role of Turkish women's magazines have detailed descriptions about the magazines. A recent magazine called *Ala* has gained popularity among readers as 40, 000 copies were sold when the first edition was published (Letsch 2011). The aims of *Ala* are to prove the possibility of glamourizing the head scarf as the symbol of Muslim women in reaction against nudity pervasive in the Turkish media (Steinvorth 2012). The initiative of reforming women's magazines in Turkey according to the Islamic standards is taken by a male editor, Ibrahim Burak Birer. The agendas of *Ala* are very clearly set towards creating a glamourized image of the women's head scarf and bringing forward the fashion trends for the veiled Turkish Muslim women. It is difficult to decide if *Ala* is a progressive or regressive turn in the Turkish women's magazine industry, but men being in-charge of directing fashion trends for women seems ironic after feminists' struggle made in 1980s. Similar kinds of transformations to modify the headscarf and long cloak (*Abaya*) into fashionable outfits are becoming popular in Iranian women's magazine called *Lotus* (McElroy 2003). The trends in the Arab Gulf states are also changing and *Abaya*

seemed to have been accommodating the fashion trends in the existing Islamic order of gender segregation (Al-Qasimi 2010).

The cultural scenes on the Turkish television soap operas portray a different picture of liberalism in terms of Muslim women's image and projection of sexuality. Not with specific feminist agendas of equality and independence, these television soaps seem to challenge the ideological control of conservative Islam in its totality. The Turkish soap opera industry has recently gained the attention of the Middle Eastern Muslim audience where western liberalism is completely discouraged at the social and state level (Rhode 2012). The Turkish soaps known for their erotic romance scenes have challenged the orthodox Islamic ideas of sexuality. Exposure to intimate love scenes and no hesitation in showing partially naked Muslim women characters are deviations from the standard of Islamic morality. It seems that the new soaps are blending western practice of heterosexual romance and the family values of the collectivist cultural society. The popularity of Turkish television soaps in the conservative Islamic societies like that of Saudi Arabia, Iran and other Islamic Gulf countries, directed the concerns of the Arab clergy who later condemned the makers of the soap opera and declared the Turkish media as a 'wicked and evil' attack on the Arab cultural values (Rohde 2012).

A Muslim woman, in the International electronic and print media is an oppressed symbol of male domination (Haeri 2002). It is generally ignored that the women are fighting for their rights against the powerful and misogynist regimes. The banning of the influential and radical women's magazine in Iran titled *Zanan* was vociferously protested (Casey 2008), but it tells how Muslim women have not all accepted and internalized unjust treatment through laws in the name of religion. There seem to be continuous transformations in the socio-political landscape of these countries and the struggle involves Muslim women in active engagement through media resources (Skalli 2006). The stereotyped representation neglects the visibility of educated, articulate, and professional Muslim women in a global world. The diversity in Muslim cultures, race, ethnicity, class and geography are important features to define Muslim women which are rarely featured in the western and international media. An additional argument of stereotyping Muslim women through media resources is that there is less representation in the International market for popular cultural artefacts produced other than in English language. The popular media resources are ready to portray the position of women in the society; however, the language of this popular media is limited to the local audience.

## **East Asian women's magazines**

East Asian cultures have a recent history of the dominance of Confucianism and communist regimes. The cultures have long adhered to the ideas of national devotion by negating personal identity and needs in the favour of the larger society. Gender segregation and role divisions have made women conform to the traditional value system. Submission, obedience and modesty have been the accepted qualities for women that subjected them to male power. However, these countries are now steadily gaining economic strength and expanding their presence in the global markets. Research on Chinese women's magazine investigates the influence of global media in a post-communist context. The researchers are interested in exploring transformations in Chinese cultural and social values and the response of Chinese local media and International media to the changing status of Chinese women in magazines (Huang and Lowry 2012, Cheng 1997, Cheng and Schweitzer 1996, Feng and Karan 2011 Davis 1999).

Nudity and talk about sex in magazines and advertisements point towards transformations in the Chinese value system. The traditional Chinese culture of repressed sexuality is gradually being exposed to media trends in which bold sexuality and female body exposure is a marketing strategy. Huang and Lowry (2012) investigated the level of nudity and body exposure in the Chinese magazines with respect to gender, race and product brands. Chinese consumers' response to advertisement that makes explicit use of sex and nudity is not favoured (Cui and Yang 2009), even then the sexual content has been reported to be increased (Cheng 1994). According to Huang's and Lowry's study females models are shown more nude than male models and western models are also shown more nude than Chinese models. The level of nudity among female western models is also higher than Chinese female models. The Chinese advertisers use less nudity in comparison with western advertisers. Chinese women's magazines are transporting sexism from western advertisements and the possible implications could be that the consumers would internalise the perfect image of body and sexiness as a feature of femininity. Another possible implication of showing western models nude is that it builds the image of westerners in the minds of native Chinese people, thus reducing the image of western women.

The women's magazines in China have local as well as International brands. The International women's magazines presenting Chinese women are different from the local

women's magazines. Feng and Karan (2011) conducted content analysis of the Chinese women's magazines. The editorials of the six most popular women's magazines were selected from the year 2006-2007. The study identified the differences between western-style Chinese women magazines (*Cosmopolitan*, *Elle China*), Japanese-style Chinese women's magazines (*Ryali*) and local Chinese women's magazines (*Woman Friend: Love* and *Woman Friend: Cute*). According to the findings of the study the editorials of local Chinese women's magazines have more content on non-traditional topics such as career development, travel and vacation and political and social awareness. However, the editorials of International magazines discuss Chinese women as consumers of the fashion and beauty industry. In the local magazines the traditional topics of relationships, housekeeping and décor are also higher in percentage as compared to the International magazine editorial. The local magazines' emphasis is on traditional values for women where their identity is associated with family and children. The editorials in the local women's magazines promote the idea of modernity in terms of looks and fashion, but also emphasise the traditional values and social roles for the Chinese women. Local Chinese women's magazines are trying to create space both for modernity as well as Chinese cultural and traditional values. According to Feng and Karan, the local women's magazines are for the Chinese readers who are still negotiating between modern social norms and traditional values. The possible underlying aims in the local magazines are to contribute towards women's empowerment from old traditions and motivate the readers to participate in the labour force.

The global expansion of western media seems to be responsible for disseminating stereotypes about different races, nationalities, cultures, religions and social values. The west being dominating the media space through all technological means and media channels has also established its own stereotypes about western social values, concepts of sexuality and of female beauty. Frith et al. (2004) conducted a comparative study on Singaporean and Taiwanese magazines and US women's magazines. The research primarily focused on the portrayal of race and women's beauty and cultural stereotypes about femininity. The Singaporean women's magazines selected in the research are: *Her world*, *Female*, *Cleo* and Taiwanese women's magazines are *Citta*, *Bella*, *Jasmine* and *Vivi*. According to the results of the comparative content analysis, Singaporean and Taiwanese magazines have more western models than the Asian models despite the fact that these magazines are published for the local audience in Singapore and Taiwan. The western models in the Asian magazines are in the category called sensual and sexy however, the Asian models are often in the category



cute/girl-next-door. Western models are shown dressed in sexy dresses more often than Asian models who are usually in demure dresses. In both the women's magazines local women are portrayed according to the values of the society in which women do not assert their sexuality openly. However, western women are shown in seductive ways according to a general perception of western women in the Asian societies. This research shares similar findings with Japanese women's magazines in which Japanese women are portrayed as demure, cute and girlish (Maynard and Taylor 1999). According to Frith et al. this portrayal of East Asian women is reductive in a sense that it rejects the adult-like and individualistic image of East Asian women in the society. Frith et al's study also point towards the attitude of magazines towards global trends that are mainly influenced by the western ideas. Another way of seeing this inclusion of western fashions and modelling trends is that Singaporean and Taiwanese are open towards global trends and new transformations are given space in the women's magazines.

The influence of women's magazines on Asian readers' beliefs and practices may differ according to the regions. The East Asian societies where women have considerable control in spending money, the income expenditure of the fashion industry seems to be guided by media such as women's magazines. A research study on women's magazines and their readers in Hong Kong was conducted by Fung (2002). The study raised questions on the influence of women's magazines on readers' shopping and buying behaviour. The study is an analysis of the semi structured interview data conducted with the five readers of the women's magazines. The women's magazine chosen for the study was *Amoeba* which is a local magazine produced for the young women of Hong Kong. According to the findings of this research women establish an emotional relationship with the magazines and use the information for knowing about fashion trends. The readers develop a relationship of trust with these magazines and believe in the information provided regarding the external world. Fung points out that the readers identify themselves with the women's magazines at three levels. The first level of identification is with the imagined community where people share ideas about fashion, clothing and styles. At the second level, the readers participate in the practices of community through purchasing the recommended materials. The buying behaviour is also steered by the women's magazines as they instil hope to transform from ordinary woman to a glamorous model of the cover page by using the products of promotion. At the third level of identification readers participate in the imagined community by actually sharing their feelings and seeking support and advice from editors and other readers. According to Fung, women

readers in Hong Kong rely on consumption of materials in order to enact their independence and individuality in a patriarchal system.

### **Indian women's magazines**

Local Indian women's magazines have been reported as a growing industry in urban and rural India (Sharma 2012). The magazine readers in rural areas are equal in number with urban readers (Das and Das 2009). The reasons for the increasing demand of women's magazines is perhaps due to an increase in the literacy rates among women in India, urbanisation of rural areas, economic independence of women or the advertising and entertainment industries using the print medium specifically to target Indian women. The impact of income has been explored by Mishra et al.'s (2012) study according to which higher income families have more readers of the magazines than the lower income families. The increasing visibility of western cosmetic brands has been noticed by Runkle (2005) according to which western industries for women's cosmetics and beauty products have heavily invested their brands and products through women's magazines such as *Femina* and *Maeri Saheli*.

Das and Das (2009) investigated fiction in 32 women's magazines, published all across India in three major languages. Content analysis of the short stories shows that heroines are portrayed with particular focus on their ideal appearance and generally they are young women who have main concerns with marital or interpersonal problems. Heroines find domesticity as their main purpose in life where being a mother is the most desired and valuable experience. Less likely the heroines are shown in professional and leading roles and often they are housewives and mothers. Heroines have less focus on their achievements and life goals in comparison to heroes. Heroes are shown as professionals and engaged in task oriented jobs where the commitment is with social work instead of domestic responsibilities. Heroines are shown less happy and having less control over their lives than heroes. Das's and Das's study points out that despite the variety in languages and differences in the regional targeted readerships, there was rarely any difference in the portrayal of women in the short stories. The traditional gender roles are reinforced in the Indian fiction where new additions are women with glamorized looks, who are self-aware and also conscious of the surroundings. The new additions are perhaps linked with increasing awareness about education and women's rights. Despite these additions an Indian woman is represented bound in traditional roles and customs of the Indian society. Magazines have been perceived as an

important resource for passing time, learning domestic skills and entertainment by the homemakers in the Patnagar town of India (Hasan and Sharma 2011). The interests of women readers are largely in reading stories about the husband-wife relationship and problem pages. Sharma (2012) claims that the magazines portray Indian women in a stereotypical way socializing readers to a male dominated social structure.

The relationship between women and reading for leisure is embedded in social class, the economy, and literacy rate among women. In the developing countries like India and West Bengal, literacy rates among women are low and reading for leisure is only for a class of women who have the economic freedom and as well as the skill to read the women's magazines. Reading women's magazines is seemingly an act of freedom of choice and a sign of independence from traditional roles. According to Chanda (1991) the content of Bengali women's magazine projects the image of modern and liberated Indian women but perpetuates the traditional discourse of reforming women. *Manorama* and *Sananda* are two Indian Bengali women's magazines prescribing modernity in their own way for the readers, but there is a clear social class and age-group divide between the readers of both the magazines. The readership in urban class settings reads *Sananda* that presents liberated and forward looking women who is engaged in professional and public life. *Manorama*, read by small town women dwellers, projects ordinary West Bengali, Indian women with modern looks. The social class distinctions are created through visual, editorials, fictions, beauty and house hold tips. The discussions on issues like that of sexuality are also linked with social class image. The women's magazines create the image of modern women by bringing a feminist discourse of independency, intelligence and awareness but the in-depth message does not really challenge the established structure of control on women. Feminism is just a brand that allows women's magazines to tag the labels of women's liberty and freedom, however, the traditional roles and the unachievable criteria of female beauty never change (Thapan 2004 and Das 2000).

### **Pakistani women's magazines**

Like other Asian countries, Pakistan is experiencing a flux of western trading companies marketing their products and targeting consumers through media forms. The local English language women's magazines in Pakistan are *She*, *Women's Own* and *Mag*. However the international brands of *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue*, published in India, are also easily available.

Indian version of *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue* are read in Pakistan because these two magazines are heavily loaded with Indian fashion trends in clothing and stories of the Bollywood media industry, both popular in Pakistan. The subscription rate and readership of Pakistan women's magazines seems to be divided on the basis of languages, education or social class and income groups. Women's magazines published in English such as *She* and *Women's Own* cater to a relatively educated class in the urban areas who can read in English and can afford to buy a copy of a weekly or monthly magazine in the price range of Rs.100/- to Rs. 250/- (approximately £3/-). Generally, these women's magazines are oriented towards the life style of elite Pakistanis and fashion celebrities. The content focuses on the entertainment and fashion needs of women who have financial means to consider the luxury of branded products. Despite being liberal in the visual display of fashion and women's clothing, the issues of women's rights, equality, women's health and sexuality are seldom openly discussed. The current trends of these English women's magazines portray Pakistani women as slim, tall and fair skinned models. The levels of nudity in Pakistani English magazines are low compared to other western women magazines. According to the categories of nudity operationalized by Nelson and Paek (2005), Pakistani English magazines generally seem to fit in the category of subtle nudity. Face, neck, a small portion of the chest, one shoulder arms and legs not above the knees are exposed. The pages of these high class women's magazines are filled with suggestions on the latest designer wear, jewellery and clothing items, and how to look trendy by wearing odd colour contrasts in the various seasons. Overall, there is a considerable emphasis on the looks, clothing styles and physical beauty of Pakistani models. This emphasis is largely irrelevant to the conditions in which the majority of Pakistani middle and low middle class women live their lives.

A recent launch of *Hello*, a local version of the Spanish magazine *Holla*, is another addition in the line of English women's magazines in Pakistan (Abbot 2012). *Hello* claims to project prosperous Pakistani families, politicians and media celebrities from Pakistan and India. *Hello* is launched with aims to challenge the negative image in media which portrays Pakistan as a destructive site of terrorism and violation of human rights (Saifullah 2012). Focussing on fashion and glamour, *Hello* is just like any other English women's magazine in Pakistan which is creating a distinction between the liberal upper-class from the traditional and low middle-class society. There seem no radical aims claimed in *Hello* towards awareness and activism for Pakistani women's rights and equalities.

There are a few studies conducted on the contents of Urdu women's magazines called 'digests'. The text based studies have identified ideological shifts and changes in the stories of the digests (Ali 2004 and Raja 2005). Zubair (2008, 2010) conducted content analysis of the contemporary Urdu women's digests which provides details about the functional aspects of body representation in creating the ideals of perfection. The content analysis claims that the visual images of female models and pencil drawings are far removed from the reality of middle class Pakistani women readers. The idealism of women's body perfection projection in the digests has been analysed in contrast to the reality of ordinary middle class Pakistani women. Zubair claims that the women represented in the visuals of the digests are objectified according to men's visual and sexual pleasure. The visual representation of women in the digests is repeatedly labelled as highly stylised and ideal, although the contrast made with the 'real' image of Pakistani women is also no less idealistic yet paradoxical to the digest visuals. This understanding of the visuals heavily draws on feminist discourse and text-only interpretive approaches. Secondly, Zubair has selected the visuals in the digests and completely neglected the other features that not only contribute in the message, but somehow also challenge the ideology created through visuals. The approach followed in the digest content analysis is cross-sectional. The analysis is drawn on a convenient sample of the digests published in the year 2005 and 2006. Due to the limited scope of the sample, the discussion on the visual content cannot determine the changes or even lack of transformations in the representation of women over a period of decades. The critical analysis of the visuals in the digests is also departed from the fact that the women readers' pleasure and satisfaction is fixed with reading the digests.

An important research study by Zubair (2010) also provides views on what readers find interesting in the digests and what needs the women's digests fulfil in their lives in conservative settings of Pakistani society. Zubair's study follows the critical approach reviewing the readers' reading practices. However, there is lack of consideration of the factors such as the impact of other media forms and influence of ideology of the digest developers. The information achieved through surveying readers' interests in the digests could provide substantial amount of information and patterns of readership, however the influences cannot be drawn unless the targeted aims of the digests are not explored. The claims made on reader's view of ideal self, levels of religiosity and desire to have ideal husbands are irrespective of the fact if Pakistani middle class women read digests or do not read them.

A recent study (See Siddiqui 2012) conducted on the contents and readers of the Urdu women's digests followed a comparative research design. This study takes a step further in analysing the impact of digests on their readers. The digests' content analysis and the interviews with the editors explain that the ideology promoted for women is that of conservative life style where women are encouraged for their submissive roles and sacrificing nature. Religion and nationalism are very important messages through which inequalities such as rich and poor, among male and female, Muslim and non-Muslim are justified for the readers. This also means that the digests just target readers from middle class and educated backgrounds and reinforce their values and beliefs systems. According the findings of the study Urdu digest readers are not different from the non-readers of the digests. The values and social roles among males and females are the same for people who read digests regularly and those who do not read them. The dominating ideologies are recreated and recycled by these digests for middleclass consumer. However, according to the results those who choose to read Urdu women's digests have comparatively more time for leisure activities than the others. Watching TV programmes and Bollywood films were also popular activities among the digest readers. In the interviews with readers they described reading as respectable activity in comparison with TV dramas and Bollywood films. The reasons justifying the digest reading were that the readers believe that the digests' stories are real to life and have positive and moral influence while TV dramas and Bollywood films are just ideal fantasies that promote vulgarity and western values in the society.

## **Conclusion**

This article has highlighted the transformations in the industries of women's magazines. The changing trends are attributed to the global expansion of western media. The women's magazines all across Asian regions deliver a variety of information to their consumers. Although these magazines are aimed towards the local audience, there is excessive projection of western women and western social values. This representation of western life style and other social features through women's magazines do not necessarily imply that popular artefacts are causing changes in the cultural values. The ever changing social landscapes of the societies demand changes in the popular cultural media. The new changes such as

women's equality rights, openness about sexuality, and visibility of women's body are perhaps attributed to the western cultures where these changes have emerged before.

The examples of women's magazines in Turkey indicate that there have been radical aims of women's empowerment followed in some of the Turkish women's magazines. However, such magazines appeared to be the product of the cultural milieu and individual's efforts to reinforce changes in the society at the grass root level. According to the information available about radical women's magazines such as in Turkey and pre-partitioned India, the medium of women's magazines seemed to be used as a catalyst to enhance the effect of social changes through mass education of women. The women's magazines are an effective medium to popularize certain ideas and images. However, the historical studies report only the presumed impact of these magazines on the readers of that time. That impact is speculative not definitive.

The magazines seemingly are items of entertainment and pleasure, however there is so much content that perpetuates ideologies of living life. The research conducted in the western countries has identified different associations between print media and women's life but similar information from Asian societies and other Islamic countries has rarely been investigated. Moreover Asian countries have different economies, cultural and historical backgrounds, dominant religious concepts, and political systems that contribute significant role in the production of women's magazines and controlling their readership. The research conducted in Asian countries is largely based on the contents of the magazines and very little is known about the consumers of magazines. The concerns on the westernisation of Asian cultures are projected on the consumers of the magazines; however, these assumptions about possible influence of reading women's magazines require further investigation specific to varied Asian contexts.

Dr. Nadia Siddiqui is a research fellow in the School of Education, Durham University. She is currently in a team of evaluators who are conducting randomised control trials investigating the impact of pleasure reading on learning and academic achievement. This article is a second submission made from her PhD thesis on reading for pleasure, which is now available in the form of a published book.

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